

## University of Groningen

### Editorial

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## Editorial

This special issue of *Human Remains and Violence: An Interdisciplinary Journal* addresses a central theme within the studies of human remains, namely, that of the ethics of their display. Highly topical, as exemplified by the touring exhibition of human cadavers 'Bodies: The Exhibition', this matter is a controversial one, as evidenced by the heated discussions and at times strong opposition generated by 'Bodies', which led in some places to its prohibition. Intrinsically interdisciplinary, the analysis of the ethics of the display of human remains has a place in the *Journal*, and the articles included in this special issue are a prime illustration of this interconnection between different disciplines which all have a bearing on what to show, and when, where and how to show it. As is explored in the following articles, these complex questions raise highly sensitive – if not political – issues, and perhaps even more so when the human remains at stake are those of victims of mass violence.

In their article 'Exposure: the ethics of making, sharing and displaying photographs of human remains', John Harries, Linda Fibiger, Joan Smith, Tal Adler and Anna Szöke address the fundamental question which is at the heart of this special issue: the ethics of using and displaying human remains, here by way of photographs, notably in post-violence contexts.

Turning to one artist in particular – Teresa Margolles – Edward Bacal offers a discussion which lies at the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and politics in contemporary art. Exploring and contextualising Margolles' art and inspirations, referring particularly to the influence of violence in Mexico, Bacal notes that her work is 'remarkable for its close engagement with death and for the stark economy of aesthetic means by which it explores the imperceptible realities of violence'. Articulating his analysis around different elements (air, water and fog), Bacal demonstrates how Margolles' art succeeds in connecting 'a lack of discernible phenomena with the contact of morbid matter, establishing a paradoxical experience of the object'.

Further reflecting on the display of dead bodies in post-mass violence contexts, Jessica Auchter delves into the politics behind such display and exhibition in the name of memory and violence prevention. In an original fashion, her analysis focuses not only on one particular post-genocidal society (Rwanda) but also on two artistic projects which have human remains at their core: one, the work of Carl Michael von Hausswolff, who used ashes from an urn at the Majdanek

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extermination as material for his painting, and the other, the One Million Bones Project, which exhibits ceramic bones in an effort to raise people's awareness of global violence.

Adopting a more historical approach in a not-so-distant past, Elyse Semerdjian reflects on what she terms the 'necrogeography of the Armenian genocide'. Her article addresses the collection, display and exchange of bones of the victims of the Armenian genocide by their descendants in remembrance ceremonies in Dayr al-Zur, Syria and demonstrates that, much more than mere relics, these bones and their display make 'unmarked sites of atrocity more legible'.

In the last article of this special issue Tadesse Metekia considers another form of display of the corpses of victims of mass violence: not one that would occur in the aftermath of atrocities in an effort of memorialisation but, rather, one that can be orchestrated by the perpetrators themselves during the atrocities. Focusing on the crimes committed by the Dergue in Ethiopia, Metekia offers an analysis of a multi-impact violence that, on one hand, is directed against the corpses of the victims and, on the other, uses these corpses to assault the community of the living.

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